

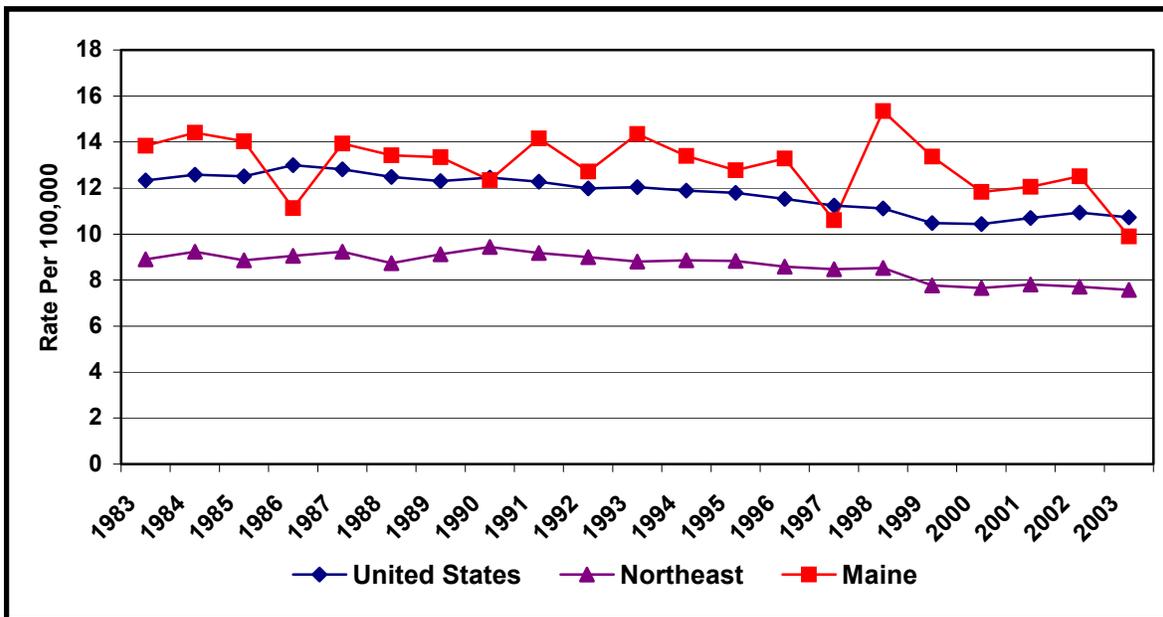
Chapter 2 Suicides in Maine

Death data have been maintained for decades in Maine and the nation. National standards for data collection and processing ensure comparability across the country, allowing valid comparisons over time and place.

For consistency, all death data were obtained from the NCHS database through the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDCP) WISQARS. Maine rates were compared to the northeast region and the entire nation from 1983 through 2003. Single year rate estimates were calculated when comparing Maine's overall rates to national and regional data, but five years of data were combined for age-, gender-, county-, and cause-specific analyses of Maine data to increase the stability of rates and percentages. Rates were calculated as the number of suicides per 100,000 population; age-adjusted rates represent the suicide experience that one would expect assuming a population age distribution equal to the U.S. population in the year 2000. That is, age-adjusted rates standardized, allowing for direct comparisons between populations whose age distributions may have differed over time or geography.

Figure 2.a presents age-adjusted suicide rates over a 20 year period for Maine, the U.S., and the Northeast region (New England, New York, and New Jersey). These data support slight declines in suicide over time for each region, and generally higher rates in Maine as compared to the U.S. and northeast region. However, Maine's rates show significant random variability, warranting caution in interpretation.

Figure 2.a. Suicide Rates (per 100,000) for Maine, Northeast, and the U.S., 1983-2003, All Ages, Age-Adjusted.



*Data Source: NCHS Database

**Rates are age-adjusted to the US 2000 standard population

Table 2.a. shows the 1999-2003 crude and age-adjusted suicide rates in Maine, the Northeast, and the U.S. for all races and for the white, non-Hispanic population. National vital statistics data show that suicide rates vary by race and ethnicity and are highest among white, non-Hispanics.¹ It has been suggested that Maine's suicide rate is higher than the national average due to Maine's demographic composition, with over 95 percent of Maine residents being white, non-Hispanic, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Due to small numbers, estimates of suicide rates among minority populations in Maine are not stable and therefore are not reported here. Maine's overall suicide rate is significantly higher than the Northeast and U.S. rate. Maine's suicide rate among white non-Hispanics is also higher than the Northeast region's white, non-Hispanic rate, but is not significantly higher than the national white non-Hispanic rate. In sum, these findings do not support the claim that racial/ethnic differences account for Maine's suicide rates.

Table 2.a. Suicide Rates in Maine, Northeast, and U.S. 1999-2003, All Ages.

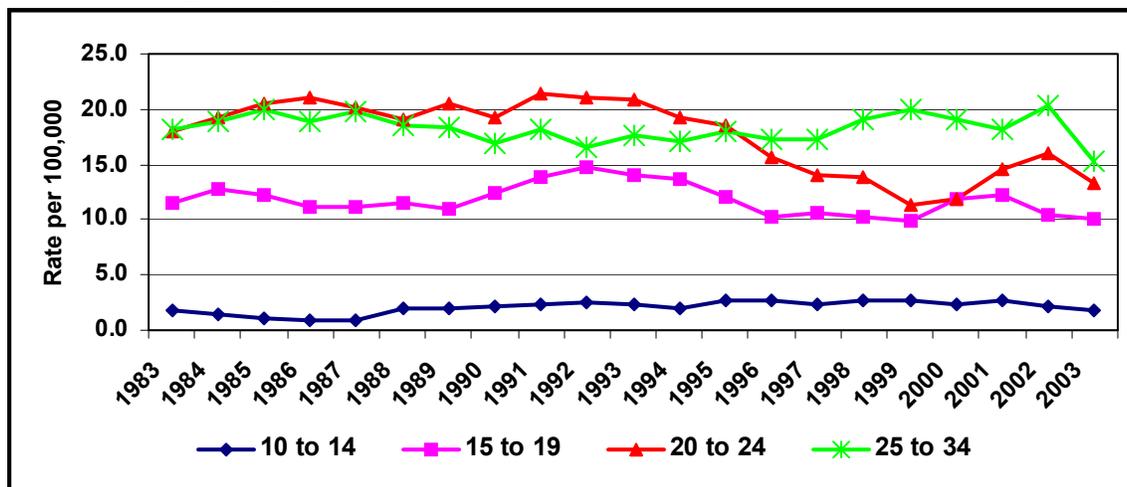
Suicide Rates:		Crude Rate	Age-Adjusted Rate
Maine	<i>All Races</i>	12.3	11.9
	<i>White Non-Hispanic</i>	12.5	12.0
Northeast	<i>All Races</i>	7.9	7.7
	<i>White Non-Hispanic</i>	9.1	8.7
United States	<i>All Races</i>	10.7	10.7
	<i>White Non-Hispanic</i>	12.9	12.4

*Data Source: NCHS Database

**Northeast is made up of ME, VT, NH, CT, RI, MA, NJ, and NY

Figure 2.b. displays age-specific suicide rates among 10 to 34 year olds in Maine over the past twenty years as trailing 5-year averages. Despite pooling 5 years of data, there is still substantial variability in rate estimates due to the relatively small numbers of suicide within each age group. Suicide rates for 10 to 14 and 25 to 34 year olds have remained fairly stable since 1983, but it appears that rates have decreased in the 20 to 24 year old age group.

Figure 2.b. Age-Specific Suicide Rates (per 100,000), Maine, 1983-2003, Trailing 5-Year Averages, Ages 10 to 34.

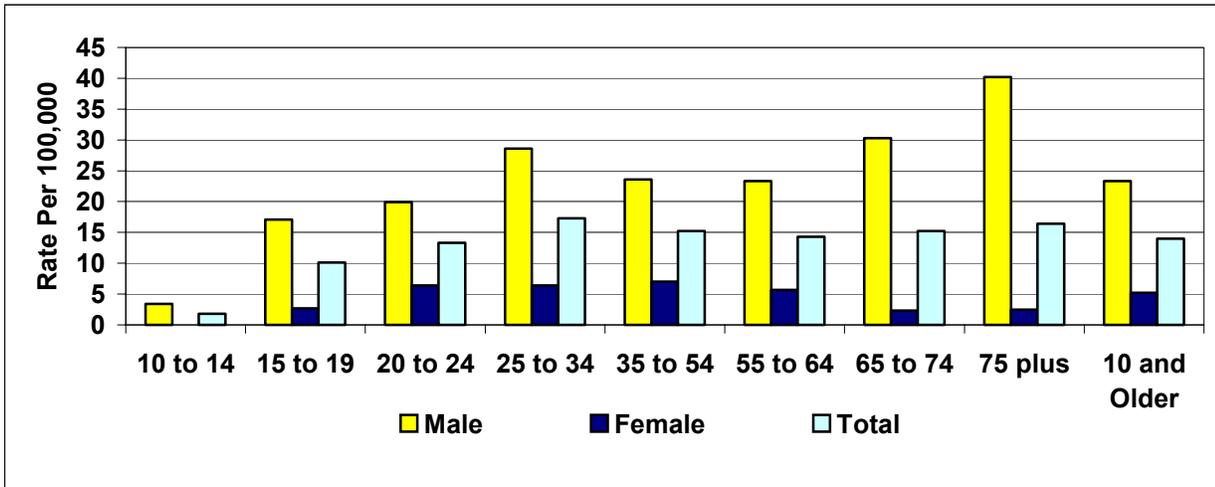


*Data Source: NCHS Database

¹ Miniño AM, Anderson RN, Fingerhut LA, Boudreault MA, Warner M. Deaths: Injuries, 2002. National Vital Statistics reports; vol 54 no 10. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2006.

Figure 2.c. illustrates suicide rates by age and gender in Maine between 1999 and 2003. In all age groups, males have higher suicide rates than females. Those 75 years and older has the highest suicide rate for males, at 40.2 per 100,000 population. Among females, the age group with the highest suicide rate is women aged 35 to 54, with a rate of 7.0 per 100,000 population.

Figure 2.c. Age and Gender-specific Suicide Rates (per 100,000), Maine, 1999-2003.



*Data Source: NCHS Database

Table 2.b. depicts suicide rates by county from 1999-2003. The overall 5 year suicide rate in Maine was 12.3 per 100,000. Suicide rates ranged from 9 (Androscoggin County) to 19.5 (Knox County) per 100,000.

Table 2.b. Suicide Rates by County in Maine, 1999-2003.

COUNTY	All Ages
Maine Total	12.3
Knox	19.5
Oxford	15.6
Washington	15.4
Somerset	15.3
Penobscot	14.1
Waldo	14
Piscataquis	13.9
Sagadahoc	12.9
Franklin	12.8
Kennebec	12.4
Cumberland	11.4
Aroostook	11.1
York	11
Lincoln	10.6
Hancock	10
Androscoggin	9

*Source of Data: DHHS, ME CDC and Prevention, Office of Data, Research and Vital Statistics, 3/8/06

**All rates are per 100,000 population

Specific Causes of Suicide

The distribution of cause-specific suicides varies across age and gender. (Table 2.c. and figure 2.d) Firearms were the most common cause of suicide across all age groups and accounted for more than half of all suicides in Maine between 1999 and 2003. Among those over age 65, 70 percent of those who committed suicide use a firearm; 45 percent of suicides aged 25 to 34 used a firearm. Poisoning and hanging were the next most common causes, each accounting for approximately 19 percent of all suicides. Hanging was more prevalent in the younger population than poisoning, but the prevalence of suicide by poisoning increased in older age groups, exceeding hanging in 35 to 64 year olds.

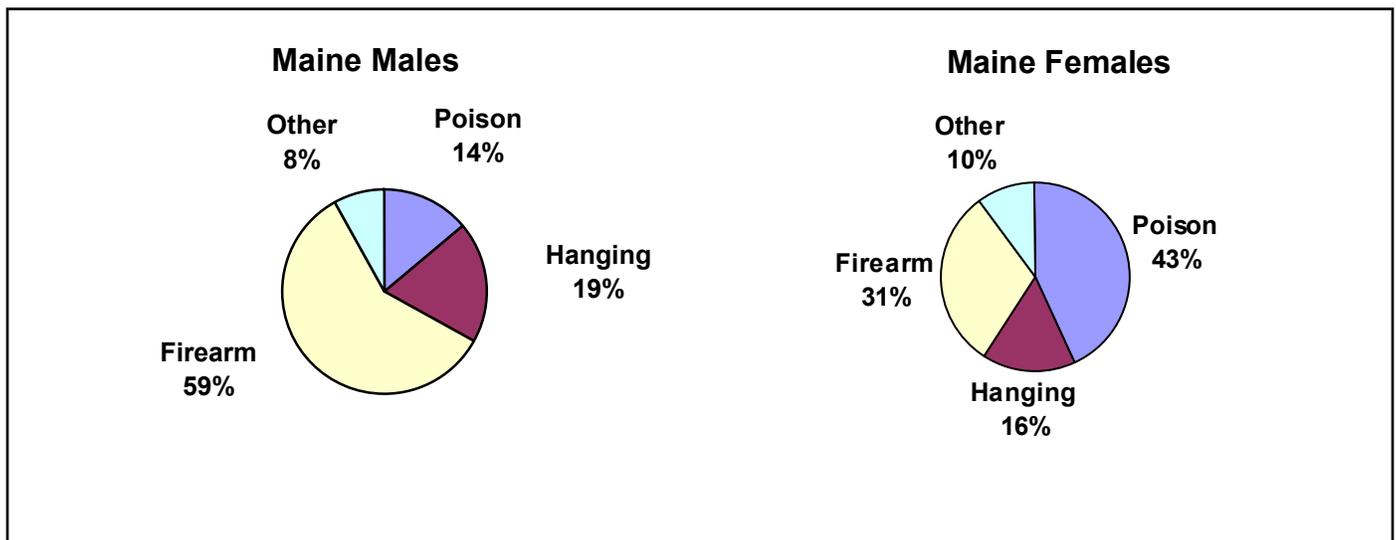
Table 2.c. Distribution of Suicide Methods by Age in Maine, 1999-2003.

	10 to 14	15 to 19	20 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 64	65 plus	Total All Ages 10 and Older
Number of Deaths	8	46	50	132	411	146	793
Percentages (%):							
Firearms	50%	48%	52%	45%	53%	70%	54%
Hanging	50	39	40	25	14	11	19
Poison/gases	0	4	6	22	25	12	19
Other methods	0	9	2	8	9	8	8

*Data Source: NCHS Database

Causes of suicide differed for males and females (over age 10), as demonstrated in Figure 2.d. A firearm was used in 59 percent of all male suicides, and in 31 percent of female suicides. Hanging was the second most frequent method used by males, while females were far more likely to poison themselves.

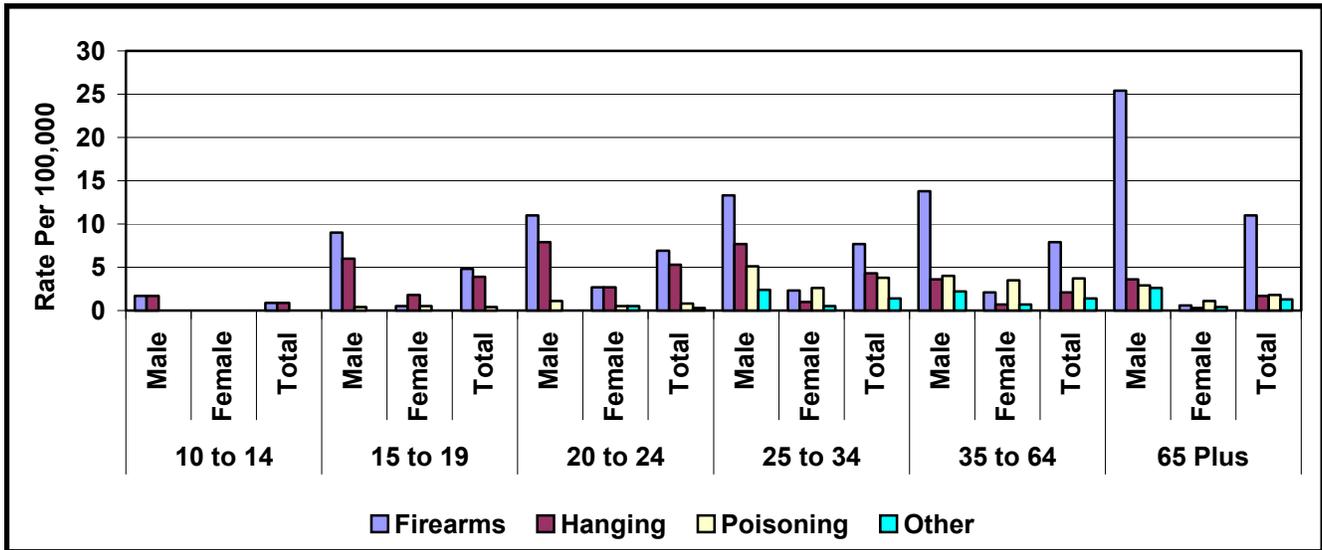
Figure 2.d. Percent of Suicide Causes by Gender in Maine, Ages 10 and Older, 1999-2003.



*Data Source: NCHS Database

Figure 2.e. presents cause-specific suicide rates for Maine males and females by age. As previously shown, the distribution of suicide causes varies across age groups and by gender. Males commit suicide using firearms more frequently than females across all age categories, especially in the 65 plus category. Among females, hanging is the most common method of suicide for those aged 15 to 24. Among women age 25 and older, poisoning is the most common method of suicide.

Figure 2.e. Causes of Suicide by Gender and Age in Maine, 1999-2003.



*Data Source: NCHS Database